

# Nafsan language

The **Nafsan** language, also known as *South Efate*, is a Southern Oceanic language spoken on the island of Efate in central Vanuatu. As of 2005, there are approximately 6,000 speakers who live in coastal villages from Pango to Eton. The language's grammar has been studied by Nick Thieberger, who is working on a book of stories and a dictionary of the language.<sup>[3]</sup>

Nafsan is closely related to Nguna and to Lelepa. Based on shared features with southern Vanuatu languages (including echo-subject marking, and the free and preposed 1st-singular-possessive morphemes), Lynch (2001) suggests it could form part of a southern Vanuatu subgroup that includes New Caledonia.

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| <b>Nafsan</b>          |  |
| South Efate            |  |
| Fate, Erakor           |  |
| <b>Native to</b>       | Northeast Vanuatu  |
| <b>Region</b>          | Efate Island   |
| <b>Native speakers</b> | 6,000 (2001) <sup>[1]</sup>  |
| <b>Language family</b> | Austronesian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Malayo-Polynesian</li> <li>▪ Oceanic</li> <li>▪ Southern Oceanic</li> <li>▪ Vanuatu</li> <li>▪ Central Vanuatu ?</li> <li>▪ <b>Nafsan</b></li> </ul> |
| <b>Language codes</b>  |  |
| <b>ISO 639-3</b>       | erk  |
| <b>Glottolog</b>       | sout2856 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sout2856">http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sout2856</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup>  |

## References

## External links

# Phonology

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Nafsan has a total of 20 phonemes consisting of 15 consonant and 5 vowel sounds.<sup>[GSE 1]</sup>

## Consonants<sup>[GSE 2]</sup>

|           | Labial | Alveolar   | Palatal | Velar | Labiovelar |
|-----------|--------|------------|---------|-------|------------|
| Nasal     | m m    | n n        |         | g ɳ   | ڻ ɳڻ       |
| Stop      | p p    | t t        |         | k k   | ڦ ڪ        |
| Fricative | f f    | s s        |         |       |            |
| Lateral   |        | l l        |         |       |            |
| Trill     |        | r r, nr nr |         |       |            |
| Glide     |        |            | y j     |       | w w        |

## Vowels<sup>[GSE 2]</sup>

|      | Front | Central | Back |
|------|-------|---------|------|
| High | i i   |         | u u  |
| Mid  | e e   |         | o o  |
| Low  |       | a a     |      |

As seen in the above chart, Nafsan's vowel phoneme inventory is that of a five-vowel system; this is one of the most commonly seen vowel inventories in any given language in the world and also especially evident in many Oceanic languages. There is a distinction between short and long vowels but it is currently in a process of change that makes its status unclear.<sup>[GSE 3]</sup>

# Numerals

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The system of numerals in Nafsan is base-5 (quinary). Numbers two through five are distinct numerals that are then seen repeated in slight variation for the numbers seven to ten. The pattern of the numerals can be seen in the table below.<sup>[GSE 4]</sup>

| Cardinal                | English |
|-------------------------|---------|
| <i>i-skei</i>           | one     |
| <i>i-nru; nran; nru</i> | two     |
| <i>i-tol</i>            | three   |
| <i>i-pat</i>            | four    |
| <i>i-lim</i>            | five    |
| <i>i-lates</i>          | six     |
| <i>i-laru</i>           | seven   |
| <i>i-latol</i>          | eight   |
| <i>i-lfot</i>           | nine    |
| <i>ralim iskei</i>      | ten     |

*Ralim iskei* can be used as an example to see the method for displaying numbers ten and above in South Efate; the numeral for ten *ralim* is followed by its multiplier, which in this case is *iskei* for one. The term for and *atmat* is added after the multiplier with an additional numeral to form a number such as thirty seven: [GSE 4]

ralim + itol + atmat + ilaru  
 ten + three + and + seven  
 thirty-seven

## Morphosyntax

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### Adnominal possession

There are two ways of marking adnominal possession in Nafsan: through the use of a possessive pronoun (indirect possession), or directly on the noun (direct possession). Indirect possession is used for general possession, while direct possession is used for nouns that are closely associated items (e.g., body parts or products, kinship terms, etc.). [GSE 5]

#### Indirect/general possession

Indirect possession is morphosyntactically represented through the use of the possessive markers *ni* (of) or *knen* (of it), or of the presence of a possessive pronoun such as *nakte* (my/mine). [GSE 5]

When possession is marked by a possessive pronoun, the pronouns follow the possessed NP:

Nasuñtap ñpur **nigمام** nen i=tarþek.  
 church big **1p.exPOS** REL 3sg.RS=fall down  
 It was our church that fell down. [GSE 6]

*ni* possession: the preposition *ni* only occurs when the possessor is a noun. The NP follows the form of ‘possessed *ni* possessor’.

I=pi **nawesien** **ni** Atua.  
 3sgRS=be work of God  
 It is God's work. [GSE 6]

*knen* possession: This form is used as an inanimate referent, and often indicates a previously mentioned participant in the discourse. It is positioned following the referent noun.

|   |      |            |       |       |
|---|------|------------|-------|-------|
| Natrauswen                                      | karu | i=pitlak   | nalag | knen. |
| story   | next | 3sgRS=have | song  | of.it |
| <i>The next story, it has its song.</i> [GSE 7] |      |            |       |       |

## Direct possession

Direct possession is used for inalienably possessed nouns. This is similar to other languages of Vanuatu that denote inalienable nouns as those that refer to relationships of part-whole association such as kinship terms, body parts or products, and associated parts (such as leaf/stem).<sup>[4]</sup> These nouns take directly suffixed possession markers, however they can also occur without possessive marking when the possessor is encoded by a noun. The directly possessed (DP) suffix only attaches to the class of directly possessed nouns. For sg and 3p forms, an unpredictable vowel (V) may be inserted to aid DP suffixation.<sup>[GSE 7]</sup>

|  |                   |      |        |                |     |                |       |
|--|-------------------|------|--------|----------------|-----|----------------|-------|
| Go   | ra=paos-ki-n      | ki,  | "Gag   | tm-a-m         | go  | rait-o-m       | wa?"  |
| and  | 3d.RS=ask-TR-3sg0 | PREP | 2sgPOS | father-V-2sgDP | and | mother-V-3sgDP | where |
| <i>And they asked, "Where are your father and mother?"</i> [GSE 8] |                   |      |        |                |     |                |       |

If the directly possessed noun has no possessive suffix, the referent is presumed unknown or disembodied. Lack of possession also occurs when possession is encoded by the possessed noun preceding the possessor. As in the following example, the directly possessed noun *rait* (mother) is preceded by the noun *tesa* (child).

|  |        |       |               |      |          |      |      |        |       |
|--|--------|-------|---------------|------|----------|------|------|--------|-------|
| Go   | rait   | tesa  | ke=fo         | tae  | toleg    | preg | tete | namrun | ses.  |
| and  | mother | child | 3sgIRR=PSP:IR | able | stand.up | make | some | thing  | small |
| <i>And the child's mother can stand up and do some small things.</i> [GSE 9] |        |       |               |      |          |      |      |        |       |

## Negation

Negation in Nafsan occurs in two ways. The first is the use of the intransitive verb *tik* (no, nothing), which can be used singularly or paired with the generic proclitic *i=* (3sgRS). The second, more widely used method, is through the use of discontinuous negative particles *ta ... mau*. Nafsan also does not differentiate between the negation of predicates and the negation of whole propositions.<sup>[GSE 10]</sup>

### Tik

*Tik* is a verb translated as 'no' or 'nothing' and is used in similar contexts to its English translations.<sup>[GSE 11]</sup> In the following example, *tik* is used in the same way as in the English translation.

|   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Go Ririal i=mer.  | nrik Ririel ki na, "Tik, ag ūa=fag." |
| and " 3sgRS=in.turn tell "  | PREP say no 2sg 2sgIRR=climb:IR      |
| <i>And Ririal, in turn, said to Ririel, "No, you climb."</i> [GSE 11] |                                      |

*Tik* is also able to be made into a transitive verb through the addition of the transitive suffix *-ki*. When this occurs, the new gloss is 'to not have'. As such, in the following example there is no instance of a possessive verb being negated, instead the verb in the sentence (*tik-ki*) is negative in meaning.<sup>[GSE 10]</sup> Another verb that is negative in meaning is *tap*, meaning 'to not do something'.

Ru=tik-ki kram  
 3p.RS=no-TR axe  
 they had no axe. [GSE 10]

## Negative Particles

The other way of negating predicates in Nafsan is through the use of two negative particles: *ta(p)…mau*. There is free variation between the use of *ta* and *tap*, ie the usage does not change according to any specific environment. [GSE 12] *Ta(p)* is used preceding the proposition to be negated, and *mau* follows at the end of the sentence. The following examples show a positive sentence, which is then negated in the second example.

Ki=mai pi as  
 3sgPS=come be coconut-crab  
 He became a coconut crab. [GSE 13]

Ki=ta mai pi as mau  
 3sgPS=NEG come be coconut-crab NEG2  
 He didn't become a coconut-crab. [GSE 13]

Sometimes, in the casual speech of young people predominantly, the second negative particle *mau* is left off, as seen in the following example.

Rui=pe ta mur na ruk=nrog a?  
 3p.PS=PF NEG want say 3p.IRR=hear INT  
 They don't want to hear, they don't want to believe eh? [GSE 12]

The *ta* marker can also act a durative marker, so in negative sentences where both uses of *ta* are present it can result in two different readings of a sentence. In the first example below, reading the first *ta* as the negative one results in the whole proposition being negated. In the second example, exactly the same sentence, reading the second *ta* as the negative results in only the final verb (*puet* "to take") being negated, thus creating a different meaning entirely.

A=ta mro-ki-n na ruk=fo mer ta puet kineu mau.  
 1sgRS=NEG think-TS-3sg0 say 3p.IRR=PSP:IR in.turn DUR take 1sg NEG2.  
 I don't think that they would still take me. [GSE 14]

A=ta mro-ki-n na ruk=fo mer ta puet kineu mau.  
 1sgRS=DUR think-TS-3sg0 say 3p.IRR=PSP:IR in.turn NEG take 1sg NEG2.  
 I still think that they would not take me. [GSE 14]

## Pronoun and person marker

There are mainly two classes of pronoun in Nafsan. The free pronoun and the bound pronoun. (Thieberger, 2006, p. 103)

### Free pronoun

The free pronouns incorporate three area, demonstrative pronouns, focal pronouns(function as both subject and object) and the oblique free pronoun(in either possessive or benefactive form).

## Focal pronoun

The focal pronoun (Lynch, 2000), also known as an independent pronoun (Crowley, 1998), functions as both the subject and object in an argument. It allows the pronoun itself to be the NP on their own unlike the bound pronouns which have to be attached to a verb. Focal pronouns express singular and plural but do not distinguish dual number.

### 1a) subject role

Me kineu a=tap nrogtesa-wes mau.

but 1sg 1sgRS=NEG fell.bad-3sg0 NEG2

*But I don't/feel bad about it. (Thieberger, 2006, p.104)*

### 1b) object role

Ruk=fo wat kineu.

3p.RS=PSP:IR hit 1sg

*They will hit me. (Thieberger, 2006, p.104)*

The examples (1a)& (1b) show the 1st person singular pronoun *kineu* performed as the subject and object correspondingly. And the following is a list of the focal pronouns in Nafsan.

|          | Focal Pronoun |
|----------|---------------|
| 1sg      | kineu/neu     |
| 2sg      | ag            |
| 3sg      | ga            |
| 1p. (in) | akit          |
| 1p. (ex) | komam         |
| 2p.      | akam          |
| 3p.      | gar           |

Table.1. Focal pronouns

## Oblique free pronoun

Oblique free pronoun function in possessive also benefactive case. For the possessive pronoun, it follows the possessed NP, generally made up of the preposition *-nig* 'from'/'of'.

### 2) Possessive pronouns follow the possessed NP

Nasuñtap ñur nigmam nen i=tarñek.

church big 1p.ex POS REL 3sgRS=fall.down

*It was our church that fell down. (Thieberger, 2006, p.128)*

There are variation forms of the suffix *-nig* , when it combines with an unstressed syllable, the high vowel will become lower. E.g. (*niger* → *neger*)

## Benefactive

In the benefactive, the argument shares the same possessive morphology, yet the possessive morpheme is used in the pre-verbal position to express the beneficiary. The following example shows how beneficiary expressed by a pre-verbal position.

3a) Mlapuas kin i=min nalkis nl sokfal.

owl sp. COMP 3sgRS=drink herbs of owl sp.

*Mlapuas who drank sokfal 's herbs. (Thieberger, 2006, p.279)*

3b) Ki=ni sokfal ut nai.

3sg1RR=of owl sp. pour water

*He poured water for sokfal. (Thieberger, 2006, p.279)*

## Bound Pronoun

Bound pronoun comprises subject proclitics, object suffix for direct object and direct possessive. For the subject proclitics, there is neither separate set of dual object, nor oblique form. The obligatory subject proclitic pronouns are being seen as the arguments of the verb. For the pronominal suffixes of bound pronouns, the plural form is used to express any number that is greater than one.

### Bound subject pronouns

The proclitic subject pronoun cannot stand alone without attaching to the first element of the Verb compound. They are considered to be clitics since they can attach to any part of the Verb compound. Subject proclitics happened in three archetypes, realis, irrealis and perfect. The subject proclitic represents the subject argument since it is the only obligatory element in the sentence except for the verb.

### Realis/irrealis pronominal

Proclitic subjects distinguish realis and irrealis situation. The realis is unmarked, and the irrealis being marked in the subject to show the action is yet to be realised, including most of the future events but not all, all the imperatives and hortatives. There is a strong preference for the subject of desideratives, achievement and predicates to be using irrealis form.

4)realis and irrealis paradigm

A=nrik-i-n ki na "He a=muri-n

1sgRS=tell-TS-3sgO PREP COMP hey 1sgRS=want-TS-3sgO

na ña=mai ni Kaltog preg nalkis,

COMP 2sglRR=come BEN p.name make medicine

i=wel ku=f tae preg-i-Ø."

3sgRS=thus 2sgRS=CND know make-TS-3sgO

*I said to him, "Hey, I want you to bring some medicine for Kaltog, if you can do that." (Thieberger 2006 p. 110)*

The examples(4) show all realis form of pronouns in all cases except the subject of the verb mai 'to come' which is appeared in a desiderative complement.

## Perfect pronominal

When dealing with aspectual past (event that is over), regarding the speaking event and past time reference, the perfect form of proclitic is used. Generally, perfect proclitics directly followed by the perfective particle *pe*, yet it is not a necessary criterion. Notably, perfect proclitics never occur in imperatives. Perfect proclitics can be found in narratives that deal with long events like World War 2.

### 5) narrative

I=piatlak tete nen kin ru=weswes skot-i-r. Go,

3sgRS=have some that REL 3p.RS=work with-TS-3p.O and

ru=lap te-ñpur rui=pe mat. Rukoi=pe mat.

3p.RS=many DET-big 3p.PS=PF dead 3p.RS=PF dead

*There are some who worked with them (the Americans). And very many died. They died. (Thieberger 2006 p. 110)*

The example(5) shows the perfect proclitics being used to refer to those who are long dead in a narrative sentence.

Traditional stories in Nafsan often use perfect proclitic form as they are set in the past. The example(6) of an extract of a custom story telling also shows that perfective particle *pe* is not necessary to appear in perfect proclitic sentence.

### 6) Storytelling

Kaltog i=kel ntak Selwin tefla=n go rakai=ler mai pak esuñ

Kaltag 3sgRS=hold back Selwin thus=DST and 3d.PS=return come to LOC-house

*Kaltog rubbed Selwin's back like that and they returned to the house. (Thieberger 2006 p. 111)*

## Bound Object pronoun

There are two separate types of object suffix, can be distinguished by the roles they encoded and the host they attached to. One type is for direct objects, the direct object suffixes attached to the object of the predicator to encode it. The other type is for oblique objects, the oblique object suffixes encode typically the location and the case of semitransitive verbs. Based on the semantics of the semitransitive verbs in the oblique case, the oblique object suffixes apply to movement to, at, or from a location. There are list of distinctive bound suffix being used in two types of object in table.2.

|          |                        | Bound pronouns |                   |
|----------|------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
|          | Direct Object          | Oblique Object | Direct Possessive |
| 1sg      | -wou                   | -wou           | -k                |
| 2sg      | (transitivisor) -k     | -wok           | -m                |
| 3sg      | (transitivisor) -ø/ -n | -wes           | -n                |
| 1p. (in) | -kit                   | -kit           | -kit              |
| 1p. (ex) | -mam/-mom/-m           | -mam           | -mam/-mom/-m      |
| 2p.      | -mus                   | -mus           | -mus              |
| 3p.      | (transitivisor) -r     | -wer           | -r                |

Table.2. Bound pronouns

### The direct object

Object suffixes encode the object of derived transitive verbs, ambitransitive verbs, ditransitive verbs and of the preposition *-ki*. To reference an object in Nafsan can be either by an object suffix or a lexical NP. Therefore, object suffix cannot appeared in the Verb Complex while there is a referential lexical NP for object indication.

7) transitive verb/ preposition *-ki*

Ke=fo pes-kerai-ki-k tete nrak, tete nrak,

3sgIRR=PSP:IR talk-strong-TR-2sgO some time some time,

masta nen kin i=wi, i=pes-kerkerai-ki ag ˜mas.

boss that REL 3sgRS=good 3sgRS=talk-strong-TR 2sg only

*He will speak harshly to you, sometimes, sometimes a good boss will just speak harshly to you. (as opposed to beating you) (Thieberger, 2006, p. 116)*

This is an example(7) showing how object suffix used in transitive verb. The intransitive verb pes-kerai takes the transitivising suffix *-ki* to become transitive which allows it to take the object suffix *-k* in the first use. However, to emphasis the object, the last clause used the focal pronoun *ag* 'you(singular)' instead of the object suffix.

8) ambitransitive verb

I=f wel ku=f tae trok-wes go

3sgRS=CND thus 2sgRS=CND know agree-3sg0BL and

ka=fo plak-e-r ler.

1sgIRR=PSP:IR with-TS-3p.O return

*If you agree with it, then I will go back with them. (Thieberger, 2006, p. 116)*

In general, ambitransitive verbs requires a transitive suffix before the addition of the object suffix. The example(8) shows that transitive suffix -e is added before the object suffix -r occurred.

9)ditransitive verb

Or ka=fo mer nrik-i-r ki i=skei.

yes 1sgIRR=PSP:IR in.turn tell-TS-3p.O PREP 3sgRS=one

*Yes, I will now tell them one (story). (Thieberger, 2006, p. 116)*

The object suffix indicates the recipient when it is with a ditransitive verb. The example (9)shows when the suffix -r is used to encode the addresses.

## Oblique object

The oblique suffix has a locational meaning. The oblique case can also be indicating temporal and spatial references. The example shows the suffix -wes encoded the day that the race was held.

10) oblique suffix

Naliati nen rak=fo res-wes me

day this 3d.IRR=PSP:IR race-3sg0BL but

katom i=pei usrek-ki ser nagis.

hermit.crab 3sgRS=first go.round-TR every point

*That day they would race, but the hermit crab was first around every point. (Thieberger, 2006, p. 119)*

## Bound direct possessive pronouns

The direct possessive suffix can only be attached to direct possessed nouns and reflexive/reciprocal morpheme yet not being a clitic. The 3 person singular is the most common form of direct possessive pronoun being found, even though there is other direct possessive pronoun see table.2. The following example(11) shows the 3sg direct possessive suffix -r.

11) direct possessive suffix

Gar nen ru=lek-a-Ø ki namt-e-r.

3p. REL 3p.RS=see-TS-3sgO PREP eye-V-3p.DP

*It was they who saw it with their own eyes. (Thieberger, 2006, p. 122)*

## Common abbreviations

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Below is a table explaining the common abbreviations used in negation examples above [GSE 15]:

| Abbreviation | Meaning           |
|--------------|-------------------|
| PREP         | Preposition       |
| NEG          | Negative marker   |
| RS           | Realis subject    |
| IRR          | Irrealis subject  |
| TR           | Transitive marker |
| IR           | Irrealis          |
| PS           | Perfect subject   |
| PSP          | Prospective       |
| DUR          | Durative          |
| TS           | Transitive suffix |

## Access to resources

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Thieberger's field recordings have been archived with [Paradisec](#):

- [summary of the collection of materials in Nafsan](#) (<http://www.nthieberger.net/sefate.html>)
- [listing of all material available via the Open Language Archives Community for Nafsan](#) (<http://www.language-archives.org/language/erk>).

## Notes

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- General notes:
  1. [Nafsan](https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/erk/) (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/erk/>) at [Ethnologue](#) (18th ed., 2015)
  2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "[South Efate](#)" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sout2856>). [Glottolog 3.0](#). Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
  3. [South Efate — English dictionary](http://paradisec.org.au/SELexicon/index-english/main.htm) (<http://paradisec.org.au/SELexicon/index-english/main.htm>)
  4. Payne, 1997
- Pages from: Thieberger, Nick (2006). [A Grammar of South Efate: An Oceanic Language of Vanuatu](https://books.google.fr/books?id=DugEkKd3koEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Grammar+of+South+Efate&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiS7Z2AqvRAhXIXBoKHXqlAb4Q6wEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=Grammar%20of%20South%20Efate&f=false) (<https://books.google.fr/books?id=DugEkKd3koEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Grammar+of+South+Efate&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiS7Z2AqvRAhXIXBoKHXqlAb4Q6wEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=Grammar%20of%20South%20Efate&f=false>). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. ISBN 9780824830618.
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2. Thieberger (2006: 46). 9. Thieberger (2006: 131).  
3. Thieberger (2006: 54). 10. Thieberger (2004: 290)  
4. Thieberger (2006: 77). 11. Thieberger (2004: 289)  
5. Thieberger (2006: 127). 12. Thieberger (2004: 250)  
6. Thieberger (2006: 128). 13. Thieberger (2004: 248)  
7. Thieberger (2006: 129). 14. Thieberger (2004: 251)

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## External links

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- *Topics in the grammar and documentation of South Efate, an Oceanic language of Central Vanuatu* by Nicholas Thieberger (<https://web.archive.org/web/20050922172244/http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/archive/00000492/>)
- *Dictionary of South Efate* by Nicholas Thieberger (<http://paradisec.org.au/SELexicon/index-english/main.htm>)
- A collection of texts in the language with media, by Nicholas Thieberger ([http://www.eopas.org/transcripts?language\\_code=erk](http://www.eopas.org/transcripts?language_code=erk))

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